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TAGS: PREL PGOV UNGA

SUBJECT: 63RD UNGA PRESIDENCY: GRULAC INACTION WOULD LIKELY LEAD TO VICTORY FOR NICARAGUAN CANDIDATE

REF: USUN 07 00941

Classified By: U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative, Ambassador Alejandro D. Wolff, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is an action request. See paragraph 6.

¶2. (C) Summary: Although many in the GRULAC remain uncomfortable with the prospect of Nicaraguan Miguel D'Escoto as their candidate (and defacto winner) for the presidency of the 63rd General Assembly (PGA), no one within the group, at least in New York, is proactively trying to identify an alternative candidate. If one does not emerge soon, Nicaragua will push for GRULAC endorsement early in 2008. According to Chilean Permrep Munoz, candidates from Paraguay or the Dominican Republic appear to be the most viable challengers. But either government will have to be pushed. Delegations will begin to focus on this issue soon and the U.S. will need to continue quietly coaxing friends in the region to encourage someone else to step forward. End Summary.

¶3. (C) Now that the holidays have passed, discussions of the UNGA presidency (PGA) for the 63rd session beginning in September 2008 will intensify within the GRULAC. The actual election is usually in the Spring but Nicaragua could try to force a GRULAC decision on its candidate, Miguel D'Escoto, between now and then. This kind of gambit becomes more tempting without an alternative candidate. There are mutterings about D'Escoto's health -- he is reportedly frail, hard of hearing and unsteady on his feet -- but if another candidate does not come forward, the Nicaraguans may be able to claim the PGA through simple inertia.

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STATE OF PLAY  
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¶4. (C) Following up on Embassy Santiago's discussion with Chilean Permrep Munoz, USUN spoke with him in mid-December. Munoz was forthcoming, reported discontent in GRULAC over the D'Escoto candidacy, but gave no indication that Chile intended to be proactive on the issue. He lamented that the unwritten rule that a country should not repeat serving as PGA seriously limited the field. Munoz believed that if a country which had already had the job came forward, the Nicaraguans would use that against them and win a contested race. Munoz noted, however, that Paraguay was one country that had not served. He reported that he had approached Paraguayan PermRep Loizaga on their possibly getting into the race. Loizaga is well-respected and Munoz saw him as a possible contender. (Note: 23 PermReps have previously served as PGAs). The Paraguayan, however, begged off pleading the uncertainties of Presidential politics at home.

¶5. (C) Another country within the region that has not held the PGA is the Dominican Republic. Munoz also saw a Dominican as an ideal candidate taking advantage of the sympathy for its gracious concession to Costa Rica in the UN Security Council race last October. The problem was that the GODR had no valid interlocutor in New York. There was still no Ambassador, and Munoz saw the Charge as a place holder with no credibility. The Foreign Minister, however, was a man with ambition who could make a viable candidate, in Munoz's view. He surmised that Morales Troncoso could even commute between New York and Santo Domingo if he wanted to keep his present job, as it had been done before. All that said, the Dominicans have yet to make a move to put themselves forward. Indeed, this continues to be the case all around.

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COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST  
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¶6. (C) This issue will begin to heat up in the next few weeks. Without another candidate to worry about, Nicaragua will likely seek an early GRULAC endorsement. The Nicaraguans claim they already have a NAM endorsement. Munoz has told us this is wrong. The NAM so far has only "welcomed" the candidacy. It is also worth noting that Antigua and Barbuda is the new chair of the Group of 77, another key bloc in the UNGA. The G-77 will want to wrap up the PGA candidature issue early as well. USUN continues to believe that our profile should remain low on this issue but recommends the Department consider two possible actions in January: (1) further informal outreach to the Dominicans to determine if they might be encouraged to put forward a candidate; and (2) an informal approach to Paraguay to determine if they could be enticed to engage. Mission is

prepared to re-engage with Munoz, Loizaga or others (e.g. Peruvian PermRep Voto Bernales) in New York but believes contacts in Washington or capitals are more effective at this stage.

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